Monumental Sculptures by Rose B. Simpson to Be Exhibited in the Ames Family Atrium

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Rose B. Simpson working on *Strata* in her studio at Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico. Photo by Kate Russell

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Contact the Museum's Media Relations Team:
(216) 707-2261
marketingandcommunications@clevelandart.org

Artworks commissioned specifically for the museum’s expansive, light-filled space

CLEVELAND (July 8, 2024)—Two monumental figurative sculptures by Native American sculptor Rose B. Simpson will soon be installed in the Ames Family Atrium at the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA). *Rose B. Simpson: Strata*, commissioned specifically for the museum’s expansive, light-filled space, consists of two 25-foot-tall sculptures constructed from the artist’s signature clay medium, in addition to metalwork, porous concrete, and

cast bronze. Visitors to the CMA will enjoy these towering sculptures in the Ames Family Atrium beginning July 14, 2024, and running through April 13, 2025.

Simpson's relationship with clay is ancestral. "I think in clay," said the artist in an interview with *The New York Times*. One of the *Times*'s breakout Stars of 2023, Simpson balances her tribe's inherited ceramic tradition with modern methods, materials, and processes. Her work is informed by her identity as a Native woman of the Kha'po Owingeh (Santa Clara Pueblo) tribe in northern New Mexico. She is from a lineage of women working in the ceramic tradition that dates back to the 500s CE. Simpson, based in Santa Clara Pueblo, NM, creates her pieces in a studio attached to an adobe home built by her great-uncle.

"Simpson's signature clay sculptures are beautifully handmade and delicate," explained Nadiah Rivera Fellah, curator of contemporary art at the CMA, "When seen in person, one gets a sense of the artist's hands and finger impressions in the clay and can see how she works the surface of her objects to shape them. For this reason, Simpson's work will be perfectly situated in the Ames Family Atrium, in that her work is striking from a distance, and it also rewards close observation."

In 2022, Rivera Fellah invited Simpson to visit Cleveland and consider creating a project for the atrium. "According to the artist, the pieces are inspired by a visit to the museum, the architecture of the building, and tumbled clay brick fragments from the shores of Lake Erie," Rivera Fellah said. She added, "Simpson considers the atrium itself a collaborator in the process of creating *Strata*, and says, 'the space spoke to me with its beauty,' and inspired the design of her sculptures."

Simpson says, "This piece is called *Strata*, and it's basically two beings, super earthy. They have these really big, chunky, solid bodies with clay busts and they're witnessing each other. They have these big cloud headpieces, kind of like aircraft aluminum. A lot of my works are either witnessing each other or they're building relationship with the viewer. The intention is to give consciousness to the inanimate because we've disconnected from that. Because it's *Strata*, in a sense it's about history, it's about something bigger than humanity."

Simpson's large-scale sculptures represent a bold intervention in colonial legacies of dependency, erasure, and assimilation, combining experimental artmaking practice with centuries-old traditions. Her work asserts a pride of place and belonging on land where Native residents have been forcefully dispossessed of their territories and cultures.

Simpson's work was first exhibited at the CMA in fall 2021 in *Picturing Motherhood Now*, a special exhibition that brought together works by a diverse range of contemporary artists who reimagine the possibilities for representing motherhood. Currently on display in the museum's contemporary gallery is *Heights III*, a sculptural self-portrait of Simpson holding

her daughter. The mother and daughter are connected through a bridgelike form linking their heads. The mother-and-child subject is one of Simpson's most iconic sculptural motifs. The arms of the figures are missing, replaced instead with handles, symbolizing their likeness to double-handled, Pueblo ceramic vessels.

The CMA collaborates with a Native American advisory committee, prioritizing its commitment to creating respectful, enduring, collaborative relationships with Native artists and communities represented by works in the collection, which embody knowledge and traditions passed down through generations.

The CMA's presentation of *Rose B. Simpson: Strata* includes a richly illustrated catalogue with contributions by Nadiah Rivera Fellah, the CMA's curator of contemporary art; Anya Montiel, curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian; Karen Patterson, executive director at the Ruth Foundation; Natalie Diaz (Mojave / Akimel O'odham), Maxine and Jonathan Marshall Chair in Modern and Contemporary Poetry at Arizona State University; and artists Rose B. Simpson and Dyani White Hawk (Sicangu Lakota).

Complementary Programming

MIX: Strata
Friday, April 4, 2025, 6:00–10:00 p.m.
Ames Family Atrium
Ticket Required

Join us on April 4th, 2025, at MIX: Strata featuring an Indigenous theme that not only provides guests an opportunity to experience *Rose B. Simpson: Strata* shortly before it is deinstalled, but also provides an opportunity to hear contemporary Indigenous music. The evening will feature DJ Shub who many consider to be the godfather of PowWowStep, a growing genre of Indigenous electronic dance music. DJ Shub won the 2022 JUNO award for Contemporary Indigenous Artist of the Year, and previously won Breakthrough Group of the Year in 2014 (with A Tribe Called Red). He was also an Indigenous Music Award nominee at the 2018 Juno Awards for his PowWowStep EP, won a Much Music Video Award for Best EDM/Dance Video in 2017, and was shortlisted for the esteemed Polaris Music Prize Award in 2013.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship, and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood with two satellite locations on Cleveland's west side: the Community Arts Center and Transformer Station.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen

Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs, and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org.